

New Haven, Hartford, Springfield Commuter Rail Study
Second Steering Committee Meeting

March 24, 2003 – 3:00 P.M.

Greater Hartford Transit, Union Station, Hartford, CT

The second steering committee meeting began with an introduction by Rich Hollis of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT). He thanked everyone for coming. Tim Sorenson of Wilbur Smith Associates (WSA) then began the presentation explaining that the Existing Conditions report is complete and ready for Steering Committee input. The report is available at the project website www.nhhsrail.com or in hard copy if requested. The presentation from the Steering Committee meeting will also be available at the website.

Mr. Sorenson then discussed the minimum build alternative. The minimum build parameters would have 30-35 minute nominal headway peak hour service only, supplemented by Amtrak trains midday. Stations assume those used by Amtrak today plus New Haven State Street. No additional tracks are proposed and the only station improvements are a minimal amount of parking. The service would require four train sets to make 12 one-way trips. However, a high degree of schedule adherence is necessary. Ridership is estimated at 3000 daily riders. With a similar fare structure to Shore Line East, the revenue is estimated at \$6,250 per day (\$1.6 million annually). Capital costs are \$43.7 million and operating costs are \$7.1 million per year. The operating deficit would be \$5.5 million per year, equating to a 22.4% farebox recovery rate and a subsidy of \$7.26 per trip. This kind of minimum build service would fall short in some very important aspects: travel timing, train-train/train-bus connections, and travel frequency.

Tim Doherty of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission asked about the fare structure for the service. Rich Hollis explained that the formula is the same as Shore Line East and similar to Metro North. The monthly pass is discounted at 50% from the per trip rate.

Bob Glover (WSA) continued the presentation with demonstration of the rail simulation model. He showed the existing conditions simulation, an ideal 35 minute headway simulation and the minimum build alternative simulation. He also explained how the program works and how it would be used throughout the study to evaluate alternatives.

In reference to the high degree of schedule adherence necessary to make the minimum build service work, a member of the committee asked about Amtrak's on-time performance. Mr. Glover responded that we need to meet with Amtrak on several issues and that will be one of the questions. The simulation does allow delays to be put into the model to see how the system performs when trains are late.

Art Handman of the Greater Hartford Transit District asked about the speeds on the line and if they could be improved to speed up travel time. Bob Glover replied that most of the line is already 79 mph except for a few locations. These include the curves crossing the Connecticut Rivers and south of Hartford and the at-grade crossing locations in

Wallingford and Meriden. To increase above 79 mph would require a significant investment into signal equipment costs. Improving at-grade crossing speeds is also not necessarily worth it because the train has to slow down for the stations anyway. Mr. Handman then asked about double tracking the line. Mr. Sorenson explained that the line would be entirely double tracked for the maximum build.

A member of the committee asked about the current travel time from New Haven to Springfield including stops. Mr. Glover explained that the time is 1 hour 20 minutes. Each additional stop adds 3 minutes to the travel time including a 1.5 minute dwell time and 1.5 minutes for lost time due to deceleration.

Bupen Patel of the City of Hartford asked if less service would mean less riders on the line. Mr. Sorenson responded saying yes, the travel demand model uses a 30-35 minute headway to predict ridership. With greater service, there will be more riders.

Judy Gott asked about the 7 to 9 am commute time. Mr. Sorenson responded that 7 to 9 am is the arrival time in the major cities.

A member of the committee asked if the study team has considered Diesel Multiple Units (DMU) on the line. Mr. Sorenson responded that we will consider them for the implementation plan.

Another member of the committee commented that the ridership is low and asked if the maximum build ridership will be higher. Mr. Sorenson replied that the ridership is expected to be higher with Enfield, Newington, and North Haven station included as well as the airport connection.

The presentation then continued with Kari Watkins of Wilbur Smith Associates going over the station alternatives that will be included in the maximum build.

Scott Shanley asked if this maximum build will then become the ultimate service. Mr. Sorenson explained that it will be the ultimate and we will then determine what we need to provide good service, including which items in the maximum build are and are not worthwhile. Scott followed up by stating that we should learn from experience on Shore Line East that certain items are needed to get ridership. We do not want to implement a service that will fail, when it could have succeeded with only a small amount of additional upfront investment.

A member of the committee asked what the potential to team with Amtrak on providing service will be. Mr. Glover answered that it will have to be negotiated, but there is precedent in other locations.

Karyn Gilvarg of the City of New Haven asked about an alternate rail alignment to the airport using highway right-of-way. Mr. Sorenson said the study team would look into it, but the new trackage may be cost prohibitive.

A member of the committee asked if the minimum build included station costs. Mr. Sorenson responded that the only station costs were additional parking at four stations.

Bupen Patel of the City of Hartford asked if the riders predicted were new riders or were currently using other transit such as express bus or Amtrak. Mr. Sorenson explained that the Amtrak service is not in the ConnDOT model, but we could look at the overall change in transit ridership to see if some of the riders were previously using bus service.

Bradshaw Smith asked if the service would be run by Amtrak. Mr. Sorenson replied that it will be evaluated as the study continues, but considering they currently own the line, it will likely be the cheapest alternative, unless they are looking to sell the line.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:30 pm with some questions and comments addressed on an individual basis.

Attendance at the meeting included the following committee members and alternates, study team members and other interested parties:

Noah Berger	Federal Transit Administration Region 1
Michael Sharff	Peter Pan Bus Lines
Art Handman	Greater Hartford Transit District
Dennis Pope	I-91 TIA
Brian Emerick	Department of Environmental Protection
David Russell	Office of Policy and Management
Tim Doherty	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Tim Brennan	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Judy E. Gott	South Central Regional Council of Governments
Ken Shooshan-Stoller	Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency
Tom Maziarz	Capitol Region Council of Governments
Richard J. Porth	Capitol Region Council of Governments
Karyn M. Gilvarg	City of New Haven
Richard Branigan	Town of North Haven
Peggy Brennan	City of Meriden
Bhupen Patel	City of Hartford
Jeff Shea	City of Hartford
James Mahoney	Town of Berlin
Peter Souza	Town of Windsor
Laura McMenamin	Town of Enfield
Scott Shanley	Town of Enfield
Linda Petrella	City of Springfield
Bruce H. Garrett	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Richard Hollis	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Carmin Trotta	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Kevin Lynch	ConnDOT, Bureau of Aviation and Ports
Bob Glover	Wilbur Smith Associates
Tim Sorenson	Wilbur Smith Associates
Kari Watkins	Wilbur Smith Associates
Cynthia R. Lemek	All Aboard
Representative James Abrams	
Representative Chris Donovan	
Representative David McCluskey	
Bradshaw Smith	